

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Group 3**

**Program 1.6**

**Question No. 92**

**Senator Di Natale asked the following questions at the hearing on 12 February 2013:**

1. Representations have been made to me that in some Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities there has been a sense of frustration about eligibility for grants such as the Department's Building Community Resilience program, with some community groups taking the view that so-called 'law-abiding communities' are unable to access grant monies unless they perversely seek to 'defame' their own communities by suggesting there is potential for violent extremism within their own friends and families. Have such concerns been expressed to the Department directly? How does the Attorney-General's Department frame eligibility for grants under the countering violent extremism outcome in order to encourage and reward positive behaviour rather than simply addressing negative behaviour?
2. Representations have been made to me that small community groups with grassroots links to communities are finding it difficult to compete with larger service providers and agencies for grants such as the Department's Building Community Resilience program. What alternative processes does the Attorney-General's Department offer small community groups to allow them to access funding under the countering violent extremism program?

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

1. The Government uses a variety of grants programs to achieve different policy objectives and address a range of community issues. The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Grants Program is designed to encourage and empower Australian communities to resist the influence of extremism. It is a key part of the Government's preventative efforts to counter all forms of violent extremism.

The Building Community Resilience Grants is an early intervention program – designed to protect vulnerable communities from being exploited by those who disseminate a violent extremist narrative. We know that al Qaeda inspired extremists are actively targeting communities in Australia with a view to radicalising vulnerable individuals. The grants can support communities to resist this influence in a number of ways:

- We have funded projects that equip individuals with the skills needed to effectively challenge the extremist narrative. The projects build up the leadership and advocacy skills of young people to challenge the extremist narrative and present an alternative way of resolving disputes and channelling anger and frustration.
- We are funding the development of leaders and mentors who are influential in the very communities that we know are being targeted by extremists. In many cases these individuals have already demonstrated their credibility in the community.

- We are also funding programs that engage directly with at risk youth who are attracted by the extremist narrative and, in some cases, have actively sought out the extremist narrative online.

The concerns mentioned have been raised with the Department. However, the Government is accountable for the expenditure of tax payer's money and does not provide grants funding to activities for which there is no identifiable need. Those applying for grants funding must be able to identify a CVE issue and a response. The Department assesses applications against its own understanding of the risk of violent extremism and broader work with Australian communities.

We know that all Australians, regardless of their religious or cultural background, want to take an active role in ensuring that their peers are not influenced by those with violent agendas. This is evident in the strong interest in our grants programs. The number of applications we receive, and the breadth of activities proposed, indicate the willingness of communities to be proactive in addressing the issue of violent extremism.

2. The program offers two categories of grants funding – the first category is from \$5,000 to \$20,000 and the second category is from \$20,001 to \$100,000 (excluding GST). These separate categories support smaller community groups to access funding under the Building Community Resilience Grants program. For the smaller stream there are also less onerous administrative requirements. Dividing the grants funding into two streams was the result of direct feedback from community organisations following the first BCR grants round, where only one stream (\$0 - \$200,000) was offered. The Department also encourages smaller groups to partner with larger service providers that have the experience and expertise necessary to effectively manage larger projects. In 2012-13, 5 of 22 grants were for less than \$20,000. However, many smaller grassroots organisations were also selected to manage grants larger than \$20,000. Furthermore, smaller organisations with grassroots links to communities are often in a better position to understand local issues and provide solutions tailored to the needs of the local community, putting them at an advantage over larger service providers.